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Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233 (1999), by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed and to submit a report on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS). Subsequently, in paragraph 11 of its resolution 1580 (2004), the Council requested me to submit a written report to it every three months.

2. The present report covers developments since my last report (S/2008/628), dated 29 September 2008, with particular focus on the legislative elections held on 16 November 2008 and the security situation.

II. Political developments and elections

3. The period under review was marked by an increase in the tempo of preparations for the legislative elections held on 16 November 2008, and heightened military and security tensions. During the early hours of 23 November, unknown assailants attacked the official residence of the President, João Bernardo Vieira, with rocket-propelled grenades and gunfire. The residence sustained considerable damage, particularly the President's living quarters, indicating that the violence was aimed at assassinating him. While President Vieira and his family escaped unhurt, tensions mounted as fears for his security increased dramatically.

4. Within hours of the attack, my Representative consulted with the President, the Prime Minister, Carlos Correia, the Minister of the Interior, Cipriano Cassamá, and the Minister of Defence, Marciano da Silva Barbeiro, as well as with other officials, on immediate measures to ensure the security of the President and to stabilize the situation in the country. He convened a meeting of the Ambassadors and representatives of international organizations accredited to Guinea-Bissau, which resulted in the issuance of a strongly worded press statement declaring the solidarity of the international community with President Vieira, and warning the armed forces against any further acts that would destabilize the country. Later in the day, five members of the military were arrested by the Chief of the General Staff on suspicion

of being implicated in the attack, while investigations into the attack continued. The swift diplomatic action taken by the international community contributed in large measure to calming the situation.

5. Preparations for the legislative elections were generally smooth. By the 16 September 2008 deadline for the registration of official candidates with the National Electoral Commission, 27 of a total of 34 registered political parties had submitted their lists to the Commission. On 4 October, the Supreme Court announced its approval of the candidates of 21 political parties and two political coalitions. The protracted period of deliberation by the Court was attributed to the fact that the names of many of the candidates were found to be on the official lists of more than one party, creating confusion over the affiliation of certain candidates. In addition, the identity documents of some candidates had expired. While a number of parties and candidates submitted corrections and amendments to the approved lists, the requirement to submit finalized voter ballots for printing on 6 October was respected.

6. The official political campaign period commenced on 25 October and ended on 14 November. During the first few days, campaign activities were low-key, the most notable campaign activity being that of the Republican Party for Independence and Development (PRID), a new party launched in September 2008 by the former Prime Minister, Aristides Gomes. PRID is backed mainly by former members of the breakaway wing of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). PRID had gained momentum after Mr. Gomes accompanied President Vieira on his two-week visit to China in mid-September this year.

7. PAIGC launched its political campaign on a platform of commitment to moving Guinea-Bissau forward through vital reform programmes, including security sector reform, with particular emphasis on the downsizing, restructuring and modernization of the armed forces. The PAIGC leader, former Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Jr., promised that, should his party prevail in the elections, he would resist attempts by self-serving interest groups to move Guinea-Bissau towards adopting a presidential system of Government, and would ensure that the provisions of the current Constitution, providing for a semi-presidential system, are respected. His comments were aimed at dispelling growing public perceptions that President Vieira and his allies were trying to increase presidential power and authority by means of an amendment to the Constitution should a government supportive of that proposal emerge from the legislative elections of 16 November. In addition, some statements by Mr. Gomes Jr. during the campaign were interpreted by the Chief of the General Staff, General Tagme Na Waie, as a veiled threat against the military. General Tagme warned of serious consequences were Mr. Gomes Jr. to carry out his threat to downsize the military in the event of a PAIGC victory.

8. The leader of the Social Renewal Party (PRS), former President Mohamed Yalá Embaló, returned to Guinea-Bissau from Morocco amid popular support at rallies in the east of the country, where he made his first campaign stop. PRS accused President Vieira of taking sides and favouring PRID.

9. Of the 21 registered parties and two coalitions, only nine parties actively participated in the campaign, while the others, primarily because of lack of funding, appeared to restrict their campaigns to the officially sanctioned media, that is, radio and television.

10. Electoral resource mobilization continued during the period, under the donor basket fund managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); Angola and Spain pledged US$ 700,000 each. On 31 October, the Government of Japan donated approximately CFAF 460 million, specifically to enable the Government to pay the salary arrears of electoral staff. Additional amounts were pledged to the UNDP basket fund by the European Commission (€1.5 million) and Brazil (€100,000).

11. For its part, UNOGBIS, in partnership with the Faculty of Law, trained 36 representatives of 20 political parties on electoral law, in particular the role of election agents at the polling stations. This support also included training of trainers, radio programmes on the role of election agents and the publication of a guide for election agents.

12. The Gender Thematic Working Group supported efforts to strength the participation of women in the electoral process. UNOGBIS supported the drafting of a Women's Political Platform Declaration signed by women from the various political parties, with the participation and support of civil society organizations. The platform developed a policy statement identifying the major concerns and constraints affecting women in Guinea-Bissau. Training on negotiation and communication was provided to enhance women's skills in politics. Training was also conducted by female members of political parties and civil society, which focused on sensitizing and mobilizing women voters.

13. UNOGBIS also organized a three-day seminar for local journalists to provide them with technical information and skills on the coverage of the electoral process. The seminar was attended by 56 journalists, including 11 women. UNOGBIS set up a fund of about $60,000, sponsored by France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to support media coverage of the elections in Guinea-Bissau. A portion of the funds covered transport and communication costs for journalists to decrease their dependence on political donors. UNOGBIS also produced a radio programme aimed at raising awareness on women's participation in elections. The programme was broadcasted by 10 national and community radio stations, with the support of UNDP.

14. The voting took place in a calm and orderly manner in almost all 2,705 polling stations, and there was a high turnout of voters. UNOGBIS coordinated the activities of international observers, involving 85 representatives from the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic Monetary Union (UEMOA) and the International Organization of la Francophonie (IOF). Observers reported that voter turnout was around 72 per cent. They applauded the fairly equal participation of male and female voters and the conduct of electoral officials at polling stations. The voting and counting processes were also considered transparent and followed the established guidelines in 92 per cent of the observed procedures. In addition to the observers coordinated by UNOGBIS, the European Union Election Observation Mission included 51 observers and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries deployed 16 observers.

15. On 17 November, immediately after the elections, my Representative held a joint press conference with the heads of the observer delegations of ECOWAS, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, UEMOA and IOF to present the preliminary results of the observation. This measure contributed significantly

towards ensuring continued calm and stability in the understandably tense post-electoral environment. In the week following the elections, my Representative also met with the leaders of all the main political parties to gain their assurances that they would continue to adhere to legal provisions regarding registration of complaints against the polls and the final voting tabulation process. All political leaders pledged to maintain peace and stability, and to abide by the official election results to be announced by the National Electoral Commission.

16. National political and technical actors, including the National Electoral Commission, played a crucial role in mobilizing adequate financial, material and human resources to ensure a successful election. On 26 November, the provisional results of the legislative elections of 16 November were announced by the Electoral Commission. The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde gained the most overall support, securing 227,036 votes and 67 of the 100 seats in the National Assembly. The Social Renewal Party won 115,409 votes and, while representing almost half of the votes gained by PAIGC, obtained 28 seats in the Assembly. The Republican Party for Independence and Development won 34,305 votes and 3 seats. The New Democracy Party won 10,721 votes, equating to 1 seat in the Assembly, and the Democratic Alliance also won 1 seat, with 6,321 votes. The Electoral Commission noted that only 10 women were elected as compared with 12 women elected in 2004. According to the Commission, in total 82 per cent of the registered voters exercised their democratic right to vote.

III. Military developments and security aspects

17. In September and October 2008, a number of security incidents were reported, linked to foreign residents allegedly involved in organized crime. One of the incidents led to the death of a Nigerian citizen, who was assassinated in one of Bissau's most popular commercial centres. The incidence of general petty theft and crime also registered a slight increase during the period, although the overall rate of crime, especially targeting foreigners, remained minimal.

18. During the weekend of 17 to 19 October, a reshuffle in the presidential security team and a simultaneous change in the security guards assigned to the Chief of the Defence Staff occurred in the wake of speculation about alleged interference in military matters inside the country by the former Navy Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto, who fled to the Gambia after being accused of leading a failed coup d'état in August. By 20 October, the situation was brought under control by General Tagme.

19. On 27 October, the National Mine Action Coordination Centre of Guinea-Bissau hosted the launching of the report of the Landmine Impact Survey by the non-governmental organization Landmine Action. The preparation of the report was sponsored by the United Kingdom, the United States of America and UNDP. It provides the basis for the elaboration of the strategic anti-mine action plan for 2009-2011 for Guinea-Bissau. According to the study, 80 of the 264 communities visited are mined, 11 of them being considered of high priority (around 14 per cent), 13 of medium priority, and 56 of low priority (around 70 per cent). The total area affected is about 2,236,560 square metres. On 7 October, a pilot programme was launched in collaboration with a local wireless service provider, MTN Corporation, providing a

toll-free service called "green line" for use by the public to report the presence of explosive materials in the country.

IV. Security sector reform

20. On 1 September 2008, my Representative received a letter from the Minister of Defence requesting a strengthening of technical support and backstopping from the United Nations on security sector reform. In response, I deployed an inter-agency assessment mission comprising representatives of the Departments of Political Affairs and Peacekeeping Operations, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, UNDP, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Development Law Organization and INTERPOL to Guinea-Bissau from 13 to 24 October, to assess the current context of security sector reform in that country, and to assist my Representative in formulating an appropriate response to the Government's request. The mission, with the support of UNOGBIS, held a series of consultations with key national and international actors in security sector reform. The report of the mission includes comprehensive recommendations for my consideration.

21. The mission noted that the security sector reform process, while rooted in a participatory process between national counterparts and international partners, lacked clear strategic vision in the medium to long term. This raised questions about long-term sustainability and ownership of the reform processes beyond the leadership and policy level of the concerned Ministries of Defence, the Interior and Justice. The mission was concerned by the lack of sensitization and involvement of civil society, the media and other key stakeholders. The mission noted that weak government capacity and the lack of institutional infrastructure and planning resources constituted key constraints in the process. The need to review and formulate existing and new legislation, including constitutional frameworks, was also underlined. Finally, the strengthening of coordination at the national and international levels was recommended. The mission noted the high-level commitment of the caretaker Government of Carlos Correia to security sector reform and commended its engagement. The recommendations of the mission, in terms of strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system in Guinea-Bissau, will be included in my next report to the Security Council, which will address the strengthening of the United Nations presence in that country.

22. The joint project of the Government of Guinea-Bissau, ECOWAS, Brazil, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and UNOGBIS, involving the provision of vocational training and basic capacity-building in Brazil for 30 demobilized senior personnel of the armed forces, is expected to start before the end of the year. The project document has been signed and an implementation timeline has been put in place. The development of a database on the necessary information and profiles for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration component of the project is also progressing, as is the design of the vocational training programmes to be conducted in Brazil by the University of Viçosa.

V. Drug trafficking and organized crime

23. On 28 September 2008, the judicial police seized three kilograms of cocaine during two operations at the international airport in Bissau. The drugs were reportedly destined for Portugal. In the immediate aftermath of the seizures, the judicial police took measures against one judicial police officer and three immigration police officers posted at the airport suspected of facilitating the transit of cocaine couriers. The incident represents a considerable improvement in terms of the interception capacity of national law enforcement agents.

24. In October 2008, the Minister of Justice and the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime signed a project document as part of the implementation of the Guinea-Bissau anti-narcotics operational plan. The project aims at strengthening the capacity of the justice sector in fighting drug trafficking through the creation of a specialized pool of prosecutors and judges. Reconnaissance missions aimed at working out a plan to address infrastructural shortcomings were carried out in November 2008 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and external partners. The Minister of Justice and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime agreed on the assignment of an additional international staff member of the Office to the Minister's cabinet to guide the national response and facilitate coordination in the areas of technical cooperation, international criminal judicial cooperation and prison reform. This measure will strengthen the overall capacity of the Ministry of Justice in planning and implementing the justice-related components of the security sector reform programme.

25. On 28 and 29 October, the Ministerial Conference on Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat to West Africa was organized at Praia by ECOWAS, with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Office for West Africa and UNOGBIS, and with the facilitation of the Government of Cape Verde. The Conference brought together experts and policymakers, as well as regional, international and United Nations offices and organizations, to help design a regional action plan and prepare a draft political declaration. The two documents will be submitted to the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, for official adoption and endorsement, during their ordinary session, to be held at Abuja in December 2008. The draft regional action plan presents a comprehensive set of actions and mechanisms to combat drug trafficking in the West African subregion.

26. On 13 November 2008, my Representative and Prime Minister Correia discussed ongoing efforts to combat drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. The Prime Minister expressed his conviction that the anti-narcotics effort should not only take account of Guinea-Bissau as a transit point but should also focus on tackling the point of origin and the destination of drug-trafficking activities. He supported the view that tougher measures, including targeted sanctions against proven drug traffickers, drug-trafficking syndicates and their accomplices, would be a significant step forward.

VI. Activities of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund

27. On 1 October 2008, the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission adopted the strategic framework for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau. Consultations have started with the National Peacebuilding Steering Committee to finalize a monitoring and tracking mechanism (matrix) setting out the implementation stages, including a calendar of action plans, objectives, indicators and measurements, as well as expected outputs or results covering the period from 2008 to 2011. Once the configuration agrees on the matrix, the National Steering Committee will endorse the document, which will be formally approved by the configuration and included in the strategic framework.

28. Implementation of the four quick-impact projects funded by the Peacebuilding Fund is progressing, as the partnership between the respective United Nations agencies and their national implementing partners continues to develop. Following the successful completion of voter registration under the joint project of UNDP and the Ministry of the Interior for electoral support, a voter civic education campaign was conducted from 10 to 15 November 2008.

29. The joint project of UNDP and the Ministry of Youth for youth employment has been formulated and approved by the Government. The recruitment of project staff, including national and international experts on youth and employment, is in the final stages. The implementation phase of the project will begin before the end of the year.

30. The implementation of the joint project of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Ministry of Justice for the rehabilitation of prisons has made significant progress. Two Brazilian experts were recruited to conduct the technical assessment of the prisons in Bissau, Bafata and Mansoa, from 8 to 17 November 2008. This will lead to final plans for the physical refurbishment of the four prisons, the setting-up of information technology infrastructure and a training programme. A set of computers, printers and related information technology equipment has been ordered, in addition to generators to provide power to the facilities. Physical rehabilitation work on site will start early in December 2008, with the support and cooperation of the Red Cross.

31. The implementation of the joint UNOPS/Ministry of Defence project for the rehabilitation of military barracks has advanced rapidly with the recruitment of two national engineers and an international architect, who carried out a technical evaluation and survey of the six targeted military barracks. UNOPS national engineers are working in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence and other technical officers to finalize and publish guidelines for a public contracts bidding process for the participation of national building and renovation companies. Once the public bidding process is completed and contracts are awarded, the rehabilitation work will begin in January 2009. Within the framework of the implementation of the project, UNOPS established, in September, a presence within the United Nations system in Guinea-Bissau and has set up an operational unit in the country, staffed with a liaison officer, two national engineers and an international architect.

VII. Economic and social aspects

32. The public finance situation of Guinea-Bissau remains very weak. The Government negotiated a commercial loan of CFAF 2.2 billion that enabled it to pay wages for July, but it has not been able to pay civil servants' salaries for the past three months, and has also failed to meet other national expenditures. In this context, civil servants went on strike several times early in October 2008. The situation was resolved through a compromise agreement whereby the Government agreed to pay one-month's salary to civil servants and 25 per cent of the amount claimed by temporary employees in the health and education sectors (CFAF 160 million). To date, however, the Government has not been able to act on its commitments.

33. Strike action by teachers and health workers has also resulted in lost school days for children and the non-availability of health services, and a durable solution has still not been found. Owing to the teachers' strikes, the World Food Programme's school canteen programme has benefited only 4,335 children of the 133,160 who were targeted.

34. Owing to the extremely tight fiscal situation, the Government was forced to reschedule its commercial debt servicing, including treasury bonds issued in 2006 amounting to CFAF 6.7 billion due in September 2008 which had already been renegotiated a number of times. The tax cuts decided by the Government to compensate for the effects of soaring energy and food prices have contributed to the fiscal crunch by reducing total State revenue by 10 per cent, according to an estimate from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

35. On 20 October 2008, IMF began the second review of the emergency post-conflict assistance programme, continuing negotiations with the Government on the possibility of a three-year programme under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility. Such a programme would substantially improve Guinea-Bissau's capacity to reach the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and for debt relief under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. Since July 2008, Guinea-Bissau has also benefited from an extension of its interim debt relief extended by the African Development Bank under the HIPC initiative. This decision involves about US$ 17.5 million and will allow the country to ensure the payment of its debt with the African Development Bank.

36. As at 6 November 2008, the cholera epidemic which started in May 2008 had affected a total of 13,652 persons, with 220 deaths registered. The United Nations system in Guinea-Bissau has been responding quickly to the epidemic, working together with the Ministry of Health, the Red Cross Movement and non-governmental organizations, with major support and technical guidance from the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Funds from United Nations agencies, partners and non-governmental organizations have been mobilized, including a US$ 601,911 grant from the Central Emergency Response Fund. This joint effort effectively reduced the case-fatality rate from 4 per cent to 1.6 per cent, and reduced the number of cases from an average of 140 per day to an average of 50 per day. This result was achieved through a well-coordinated response by treatment centres and mobile teams. In the period leading up to the legislative elections, the risk of a spread of the disease increased significantly. In response, on 10 November, the United Nations country team presented a new appeal to the Central Emergency

Response Fund to support initiatives aimed at containing the epidemic over the following three months.

37. The food security situation in Guinea-Bissau has deteriorated further since my last report, mainly because of the additional increase in the price of rice, a staple food in the country. In September and October 2008, the price of local rice increased by 23 per cent (from CFAF 550 per 1-kg bag to CFAF 675), while the price of imported rice increased by 33 per cent (from CFAF 450 per 1-kg bag to CFAF 600). On the other hand, the cashew nut campaign reached a record level in 2008, with the export of 106,456 tons compared to 96,117 tons in 2007. The price set by producers increased from CFAF 200 per 1-kg bag in 2007 to CFAF 380. Some rural communities seem to have fared better this year, as a result of better barter mechanisms for cashew nuts and rice. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has responded by providing additional agricultural supplies, such as seeds, fertilizers and equipment, and with crop diversification and intensification programmes.

38. UNDP has launched an innovative "Youth Initiative" which harnesses the creative energy of the youth in Guinea-Bissau for peacebuilding. Through this pilot programme, 10 youth groups are receiving training in advocacy, strategic planning and conflict resolution, as well as financial support to implement short-term peace initiatives of their own. The Youth Initiative is building positive relationships between youth groups and the military that could be sustained beyond the pilot phase.

VIII. Human rights aspects

39. The Council of Ministers, in its session of 6 November 2008, approved the law establishing the National Commission for Human Rights, a governmental body entrusted with the protection and promotion of human rights in Guinea-Bissau. This mechanism will be responsible for vigilance, early warning, monitoring and investigation of human rights issues. The Commission will have 30 members drawn from different public and private entities, headed by a president, and will have as observers the representatives of the Ministries of Justice and the Interior, the Prosecutor General's Office, civil society, religious bodies, political parties, the Institute for Women and Children, the media and trade unions. The National Commission for Human Rights has a four-year mandate.

40. UNOGBIS, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF and UNDP, as well as its partners from the Forum for the Humanitarian Situation in Prisons, visited detention centres in Bissau on 7 October 2008. The objectives of the visits were to raise awareness on the fundamental rights of detainees and support national authorities in ensuring and guaranteeing respect for the dignity inherent in human beings even if deprived of freedom. During the visits, several human rights violations were verified, namely the existence of detention centres with inadequate facilities and lacking minimum living standards. Lack of water and food in the detention centres of the Segunda Esquadra police station, detention of women and men jointly in the same cells without respecting the specific needs of either the women or the men, detention of children jointly with adults, lack of medical assistance and lack of rehabilitation programmes and social assistance to the detainees were also observed.

41. Following the visits, several recommendations were made, including the creation and promotion of weekly medical assistance for detainees in all prison facilities in the country to address the high number of cases of disease and death in prisons. Other recommendations included the establishment of additional centres and specific security measures for children and adolescents, as well as special detention facilities for women; the adoption of mechanisms for the provision of water and food in the prison centres of the judicial police and the Segunda Esquadra police station; and the closure of the underground detention cells of the Primeira and Segunda Esquadra police stations in Bissau.

42. A three-year UNDP project on strengthening the rule of law at a cost of US$ 8,260,000 was approved on 15 October and includes contributions from the Spanish Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund.

IX. Implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008)

43. In line with actions to support the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), a project developed by UNDP, UNFPA, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNOGBIS in the area of justice and security sector reform succeeded in qualifying for a grant from the Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund. The objective of the project is to strengthen the judicial system, including access to justice, public security, law enforcement and civilian management, oversight of security institutions through a strategy which entails participatory and deliberative processes, and gender and conflict-sensitive approaches. The proposal will contribute directly to redressing the lack of gender perspectives within the current security sector reform programme.

44. A workshop scheduled for 3 to 5 December 2008 on gender and security sector reform aims at strengthening the capacity of women's committees within the security and defence forces to develop action plans and advocacy efforts in line with ongoing and planned activities within the security sector reform strategy.

45. The first draft of the initial report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was finalized with support from the United Nations gender thematic group in October 2008.

46. UNDP is finalizing a study to collect updated information on gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices in society, and on women's access to social services. The study will include information on different age and social groups, as well as recommendations to address these issues through partnerships with the Government and civil society.

X. Staff security

47. Despite the massive socio-economic problems faced by the population and the potential for increased security-related incidents in the run-up to and during the legislative elections, no significant threats to the security of United Nations staff were reported during the period under review. The crime rate continues to be relatively low, although incidents of petty crime continue to be reported. Three incidents involving United Nations staff members were reported, including one

house and two vehicle break-ins. Nevertheless, United Nations personnel can move freely within the country, in accordance with the security phase and procedures in place.

XI. United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau

48. With reference to the Council's request, contained in its presidential statement of 19 October 2007 (S/PRST/2007/38), that I submit recommendations on the reconfiguration of the United Nations presence in Guinea-Bissau, I wish to inform the Council that, following the Policy Committee's decision on integration in June 2008, a Headquarters-based integration task force on Guinea-Bissau was established in October 2008 to initiate discussions on an integrated United Nations presence in that country. Now that the legislative elections have successfully been held, a technical assessment mission will be conducted early in 2009 for consultation with national authorities, regional and international partners and members of the United Nations system operating in Bissau, with a view to proposing options for an integrated United Nations presence in Guinea-Bissau. Following the conclusions of those consultations, I intend to submit my recommendations to the Council on the setting up of an integrated United Nations mission in Guinea-Bissau.

XII. Observations and recommendations

49. I acknowledge the commitment and dedication shown by the Government and people of Guinea-Bissau in the holding of peaceful and orderly legislative elections on 16 November 2008, and in respecting the results of the elections. It is my sincere desire to see the new Government usher in a new era of democracy, stability and prosperity for all the people of Guinea-Bissau. I commend the international partners who supported the electoral process, including by providing vital funding and technical assistance.

50. I also thank the Government of Guinea-Bissau for its cooperation with the United Nations security sector reform inter-agency assessment mission, which visited Guinea-Bissau in October 2008, and its continued commitment to implementing a reform agenda. I would recommend that the Security Council continue to support the implementation of the security sector reform programme, with the objective of reaffirming the centrality of security and justice sector reform to the consolidation of peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau.

51. On its part, ECOWAS must be commended for the successful holding, in Cape Verde, of the Ministerial Conference on Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat to West Africa. The resulting regional action plan is an important step in combating the scourge of drug trafficking and organized crime in West Africa, and I appeal to ECOWAS member States, as well as members of the Security Council and the international community as a whole, to monitor and support the timely implementation of the action plan.

52. Given the high levels of poverty and unemployment in the region, especially among young people, the impact and manipulative power of drug trafficking and organized crime cartels are highly detrimental to the consolidation of the rule of

law, peace and stability in the region. In the case of Guinea-Bissau specifically, drug trafficking has resulted in deepening corruption and further weakening of national institutions. As requested by the Council in its presidential statement of 15 October 2008 (S/PRST/2008/37), I will continue consultations with the Government and other stakeholders on further measures to address the drug-trafficking challenges in Guinea-Bissau. In the meantime, I call on the international community to enhance its support and assistance to the Government of Guinea-Bissau, to reinforce the national capacity to combat drug trafficking.

53. I welcome the formal adoption by the Peacebuilding Commission of the strategic framework for Guinea-Bissau, and urge the Commission to increase its engagement with the country. It is encouraging that the implementation of the four quick-impact projects financed by the Peacebuilding Fund is proceeding well. I call on the authorities in Guinea-Bissau to accelerate their engagement with the Commission, through the National Steering Committee.

54. In the area of economic and social development, the role and contribution of the United Nations system has been significant, especially in supporting the Government and the people of Guinea-Bissau in fighting the cholera epidemic. Overall social and economic indicators for the country still remain disturbingly low. I acknowledge in particular the role and contribution of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the African Development Bank and the European Commission in supporting Guinea-Bissau in its efforts to overcome complex economic and social challenges. I recommend that the new Government undertake crucial public sector and fiscal reforms in order to lead the country out of the perennial vortex of financial malaise and social and political crises. This will take determination, hard work and political will, but it is an achievable goal.

55. On 21 November, the Government of Guinea-Bissau requested the extension of the mandate of UNOGBIS for another year, to enable the Office to continue assisting national efforts to stabilize the country. I would therefore like to recommend that the mandate of UNOGBIS be extended for an additional year, until 31 December 2009. This would allow the Office to continue providing crucial peace consolidation support to the Government and people of the country, including in the areas of the rule of law and human rights, security sector reform, drug trafficking and organized crime, and national reconciliation. Following the deployment of a technical assessment mission on integration to Guinea-Bissau in the first quarter of 2009, I will submit recommendations on transforming UNOGBIS into an integrated office.

56. In conclusion, I would like to commend the staff of UNOGBIS, under the leadership of my Representative, Shola Omoregie, as well as all the staff of the United Nations country team, for the important work they continue to carry out in Guinea-Bissau, under challenging and sometimes dangerous circumstances.